

**Three-Day Seminar
on The Role of
Muslim Organisations in Promoting
Development and Human Fellowship in
Muslim Minority Countries in Asia**

**PRAGMATIC EDUCATION AS A
TOOL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
MUSLIM UMMAH**

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24 - 26 SEPTEMBER 2004



**Jamiyah Singapore In Co-operation With
The Islamic Educational,
Scientific And Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) And
The Ministry of Awqaf, Kuwait**

Pragmatic Education For The Development of The Muslim Ummah

1. Introduction

September 11, 2001 was a watershed in the history of Muslim education, not only of world politics. More significantly, September 11 led to the scrutiny of the madrasa or the traditional system of Islamic education. The United States believes that the militant groups arose from among the followings of leaders who had a strong affiliation to Islam. Consequently, they believe that the root of the problem of terrorism lies in the manner in which Islamic education is taught in Muslim lands. Once, the term jihad had been used to the advantage of the Americans in the Afghanistan war against the Russian occupation, but now that it has been used against them since September 11, the Americans believe that the term should be taken out from the Islamic studies curriculum. In 2002, the International Crisis Group, which is led by Western scholars, statesmen and corporate leaders conducted a study of madrasa in Pakistan. In its report, the Group acknowledged the importance of madrasa education for the society and also proposed the integration of the system into the formal education sector as well as its proper regulation and monitoring.¹ It was concerned with the provision of job opportunities for the madrasa graduates. The US has even used its influence to persuade Saudi Arabia and a few countries in the Middle East to revise their Islamic education curriculum.² In addition, it has also used its might and influence to ensure that the madrasa would not breed hatred against the West. "In some places, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the education debate has focused on how, or whether, the religious curriculum promotes intolerance and extremism."³

In addition to the problems resulting from globalization and September 11, the problems of poverty, illiteracy and educational access seem to be a perennial challenge in the underdeveloped Muslim countries. Meanwhile, the more economically developed and rich Muslim countries, which are gearing into industrial development, are infested with the problems of social ills traditionally associated with modernization. The hedonistic culture, crimes, deviant sexual lifestyles such as homosexuality, lesbianism, adultery, premarital sex and the diseases associated with it such as STD, HIV, Aids, and even abandoned newborns have found their way into the social fabric of Muslim society and this pose another great challenge in attempts to modernize harmoniously while keeping the Islamic values intact.

Faced with these challenges, Muslims should examine the roots for the subjugation, intimidation and the lack of inner dynamism of the Muslims. A few Muslim scholars such as Al-Attas, have identified the problem to lie in the loss of adab (discipline) caused by the confusion over knowledge, while others like al-Faruqi, have pointed the root cause to the dualistic educational system — traditional, religious and the liberal, secular educational systems, that have torn Muslims apart. Both have called for the Islamization of contemporary knowledge and an integrated system of education as solutions. This paper would like to put forth another thesis, that is, the problem lies in the teaching methods and the curriculum of Islamic education. Basically, Islamic education has not been able to produce students who can think critically or generate original and creative ideas. It has not been able to successfully educate Muslim youth and prepare them to face the challenges of their time. We definitely cannot stop the quick flow of information, ideas and cultures from any country in the world today as a result of information and communication technology and globalization. But we could provide our ummah, especially the youth, with the weapon to defend their own beliefs and values by teaching them to be critical, to evaluate and be selective with the information available. It is for this reason that an effective Islamic education program, which could help instill Islamic values and develop strong characters, and more importantly develop critical minds, is vital for the survival of our beliefs and values.

It is in this respect that pragmatic education could contribute to the development of Muslim youth. Hence, this paper examines the pragmatic world view and its philosophy of education - its aims, methods of education and curriculum from an Islamic perspective. It argues that it is possible to integrate certain elements of pragmatic education that do not contradict the Islamic world view into Muslim education as a tool for the development of the Ummah. It argues further that the Islamic world view would not object to pragmatic aims of education for understanding and helping the child to think, for preparation for life in society, and education as a scientific and experimental enterprise. It asserts that these elements which are urgently needed in Muslim education today, are inherent in the Islamic world view but unfortunately, have been neglected. Hence, they should be integrated to complement the traditional aims of Islamic education and to enhance the revival of the Muslim leadership in knowledge and civilization.

The origin of pragmatism and its philosophy

The word pragmatism is derived from a Greek word meaning "work."²⁴ Pragmatism is a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of processes and doing the things that will help achieve the desirable ends. This seems a sensible idea and it makes one wonders why people insist on things and using processes that do not work. However if one thinks deeply, one will not be surprised because such impracticality does exist because of a number of reasons, among which are the forces of tradition, customs, as well as fear and apathy. Certain ways of

behaving worked well in the past, but they have served their time and are not practical today. Pragmatism attempts to examine traditional ways of thinking and doing, and wherever desirable and possible, to reconstruct our approach to life so that it is more in line with the human needs of the time. Pragmatism has been known by a variety of names, from "pragmaticism" to "instrumentalism," "functionalism," and "experimentalism".⁵

Pragmatism is often viewed as a twentieth century philosophy developed by Americans. However, its root can be traced to British, European and ancient Greeks philosophic traditions. Some of Heraclitus' ideas were similar with modern experimentalism. The most important of these is the notion that change is fundamental and the only reality is a constant flux. This idea was also supported by Pythagorus, the sophist, who was motivated by it and thus, define knowledge as sense perception. Heraclitus also proposed the duality of nature such as day and night, water and earth and the manner they were synthesized, similar to those of Dewey's labour and leisure, and theory and practice. One important element of this tradition is the developing world view brought about by the "scientific revolution." The the questioning attitudes of the Enlightenment period and the development of a more naturalistic humanism are the outgrowth of this movement. The background of pragmatism can be found in the works of Francis Bacon, Locke, Rousseau and Darwin. But the philosophical elements that give pragmatism a consistency and system as a philosophy in its own right are primarily the contributions of Charles S. Pierce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952).

According to Butler, Pierce was the "originator of the single root idea from which pragmatism has grown".⁶ Pierce coined the term "pragmatism" for this epistemology that established that the criterion for determining the meanings of ideas is laid in their consequences after they have been put into practice in the objective world. This idea was popularized by James who gave a different shade of meaning to it. James introduced the concept of free will. He believed that the acceptance of one's own freedom of will would imply putting the idea to work and discovering for oneself its essence and meaning. James' variety of pragmatism was not atheistic in the sense of belief in the higher spiritual order. It was not naturalistic in its metaphysics, and it held the permanence of truth once it has been verified by the pragmatic principle.

Dewey made some headway in perfecting the philosophy, making it more experimental than both Pierce and James had intended, and furnishing it with a unique world view. In Dewey's variety of pragmatism, the conception of self as a spiritual ego was dropped together with the idea of individual will as the cause of changes in the events of the world. Dewey abandoned the metaphysical notion of the universal and the Absolute Mind and replaced this with the conception of cultural environment. He emphasized that cultural environment has a pervasive influence in the formation of ideas, belief and intellectual attitudes of individuals. Dewey emphasized the social function of intelligence in causing change in the world instead of the old notion of the

metaphysical mind, as it united intelligence and the world. Dewey underscored the importance of the scientific method and hoped that it could be applied in solving the world's problems, the social and moral, and the technological as well.

Five propositions describe the attitudes of contemporary pragmatism:⁷

- (1) All things flow; nothing remains the same.
- (2) It is impossible to gain knowledge of ultimate reality.
- (3) Hypotheses tested by experience constitute the nearest approach to knowledge which we have.
- (4) Science should become a social pursuit by being applied cooperatively to the study of all the problems of man.
- (5) In order to determine the meaning of an idea, it must be put into practice; the consequences which follow constitute the meaning of the idea.

Butler has treated the question of epistemology, metaphysics, logic and axiology in the philosophy of pragmatism systematically and clearly in his work. He compared pragmatic epistemology with rationalism and empiricism. He asserted that pragmatism is unlike rationalism in that pragmatism avoids reducing experience to generalizations and instead considers experience as specific and particular. However, the two are alike in that both stress the pattern of successful organization of facts as being central to knowledge. Butler asserted that empiricism is unlike pragmatism in that the latter does not regard senses as the only doors to knowledge and sense perception as a passive action of receiving impressions from the outside world. Pragmatism does not regard that sensation yields ready-made facts. However he argued that, "pragmatism is empirical in that its frame of reference is always sense-perceptual experience, not predisposed principles of reason."⁸ Pragmatism acknowledges the importance of observation for facts, but not for the sake of acquiring a storehouse of information. It emphasizes the importance of observation and the content it yields for the development of the experimental method.

According to Butler, the pragmatic metaphysics is "heavily weighted in epistemology, so heavily, in fact, that it has been accused of having no metaphysics."⁹ Even Dewey stated that "no theory of Reality in general . . . is possible or needed." But there were some pragmatists who worked on the metaphysics of pragmatism, such as Sidney Hook and John L. Childs. The metaphysics of pragmatism can be summarized in ten brief propositions:¹⁰

- a) the world is all foreground;
- b) it is characterized throughout by process and change;
- c) it is precarious;
- d) it is incomplete and indeterminate;
- e) it is pluralistic;
- f) it has ends within its own process;
- g) it is not or does not include, a trans-empirical reality;
- h) man is continuous with the world;
- i) man is not an active cause in the world;
- j) the world does not guarantee progress.

The pragmatists found the Aristotelian logic inadequate for the era of modern science because it rests on the assumption of a "bounded and closed" system. Hence, the pragmatists, especially Dewey, reformulated their logic based on the conception of Nature that is an open system where there is active change and motion. In this new logic, the emphasis is on the relations of events of phenomena rather than on facts and generalizations. The pattern of Dewey's logic comprised six stages:

- a) the indeterminate situation,
- b) the institution of a problem,
- c) the determination of a problem-solution,
- d) reasoning,
- e) the operational character of facts-meaning, and
- f) scientific inquiry.

Butler also characterized pragmatic logic as autonomous, closely related to biology and culture, and the social or individual nature of the indeterminate situations.

With respect to axiology, pragmatism does not define values as existing in any ultimate or final manner. Instead values are defined by virtue of their relation with individual-social activities. In pragmatism, desire is the guiding principle of value, that is, whatever is the object of a person's interest has value for him. But this must not be understood in a purely selfish or subjective way because value has to be treated more critically, more objectively and less personally. In addition, the pragmatic guiding principle of value has to be looked from two different perspectives - the present situation and the possible future situations, so that the resolution of the present situation allows for a satisfactory control and direction into the future.

In another work, Kneller summarized that the principal themes of pragmatism are (1) the reality of change, (2) the essentially social and biological nature of man, (3) the relativity of values, and (4) the use of critical intelligence.¹¹

Elements of the pragmatic world view

Although the antecedents of the philosophy of pragmatism are many and varied, there are some basic elements that are vitally important. These are induction, the importance of human experience, naturalistic humanism, and the relations between science and the culture of man.

Induction: A New Way of Thinking

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) contributed two ideas in modern pragmatism. Firstly, he introduced the method of induction, which was in contrast to the Aristotelian deductive method. This was a significant step in scientific discovery. Secondly, he introduced the idea that science is a social pursuit, that is, it involves a group of men working together for a common purpose.

Bacon was concerned with the way of thinking. He felt that the way of thinking before his time emphasized very much on deduction. He argued that this way of thinking, which was primarily the method of religion and speculative philosophy resulted in many errors, especially with material phenomena. Aristotle's syllogism is one good example of the method of deduction. He gave an instance of how deduction could go wrong through the example of Aristotle's belief that if objects of different weights are dropped from a given height they fall at different speeds. Bacon strived to change his people's mindset of putting faith in old beliefs and generalizations that may or may not be valid and reliable. He urged them to think and to develop valid knowledge. Induction encouraged people to be experimental in their approach. In essence, Bacon's ideas gave human experience of and within the world of everyday life a central position.

Bacon's influence on pragmatism has been significant. The induction method which he proposed became the foundation of the "scientific method," which is considered as one of the pillars of pragmatism. Although Bacon thought that science should be concerned primarily with the material things, the pragmatists extended it to include problems in economics, politics, psychology, education, and even ethics. In fact, Dewey considered the process of scientific thinking as central to the method of education. He argues that "when we think in an orderly and coherent fashion, we are really thinking along the lines of scientific method, although we may not be conscious of it as such. If we were all educated in it - then our thinking would more likely be characterized by orderliness, coherence, and desirable consequences".¹²

The centrality of experience

The centrality of human experience in the pragmatic philosophy which gave pragmatism an environmental orientation has its precedent in Locke (1632-1704) and Rousseau (1712-1778). Locke believed that an individual's mind at birth is blank, a *tabula rasa*, and they come from experience, that is, sensation and reflection. The more experience one has, the more ideas are imprinted on the mind and the more to relate to. One can have false ideas as well as true one and the only way to be sure that one's ideas is true, is by verifying them in the world of experience. Locke's notion regarded the mind as passive and was thus rejected by Dewey who argued that the mind is an active agent and the transactional nature of the relations between the organism and the environment. Because of Dewey's cognizance of social forces in the individual act in the practical world, this gives support to a social-adjustment or "life adjustment" view of education; that is, that one should be taught to adjust to the way things are.

Rousseau also had a great contribution for pragmatic theory. In his novel, *Emile*, he put forth the notion that individuals are basically good but they are corrupted by civilization. He argued for those aspects of civilization that were not corrupting to a natural life. His emphasis on the place of naturalism in

education has affected the way pragmatic educators view the child - not as miniature adults but as organisms going through various stages of development. He believed that education should be guided by the child's interests.

Science and society

The West has experienced a scientific revolution in which old metaphysical views, religious views, even social and political philosophies have either been altered or have fallen apart before the forces of science. The scientific method was not only applied in the natural phenomena but was eventually applied to the practical area of social structures and social relations. This has been due to the effort of Comte, who influenced the development of pragmatic thought by helping pragmatic thinkers become sensitive to the possibilities of using science to help alleviate social problems. The pragmatists were concerned with the social problems resulting from the scientific advancement. Comte's positivism view the universe as one in which everything is laws and relations, and there is no substance. This view is similar to pragmatism, which rejects substance as the essence of reality, but it differs from pragmatism in that it holds laws and relations to be constant and unchanging. This rejection of substance makes pragmatism similar to Comte's positivism.¹³ Both pragmatism and positivism share the common positive social interest. They believe that ideas arise in a social context and have social significance if they have any value. Dewey drew from Comte the idea that science can be a regulative method in social life.¹⁴ The pragmatists believe that theology and metaphysics once served a useful function in helping explain things. The rise and perfection of Scientific thinking has surpassed them. The secrets of human kind and nature can now be unlocked, and man can live in harmony with themselves and all other matter. However, today we know that scientific and positivistic thought often produces results that threaten to destroy mankind.

Dewey and his influence on American pragmatism

Among the three American pragmatists, Dewey left the most lasting impression of pragmatism. William James popularized pragmatic thought and Dewey 'systematized' it and carried its leading ideas to far-reaching development. Dewey was greatly influenced by the ideas of Darwin¹⁵ Pierce and James but his serious beginnings in philosophy were primarily through the Hegelian, tradition, "the Hegel who pursued process and development and not the Hegel who arrived at Absolute Spirit".¹⁶ Dewey emphasized on the centrality of experience. He argued that experience and nature are not two different things separated from each other, but rather experience itself is of nature. People do not experience "experience" but the world in which they live, a world of things, ideas, hopes, fears, and aspirations, all rooted in nature. He claimed that the problem with previous philosophy was the confusion over experience itself and the thoughts about it. He argued that thinkers had focused on the reflective products of experience and had held these to be ultimate reality. They had settled upon abstractions and not genuine experience. His investigations into

experience were not just speculative but directed primarily toward real-life problems. He agreed fully with Pierce on the practical consequences of ideas. Dewey believed that the scientific method and experimental thinking could, if used properly, achieve desirable ends. In fact, Dewey strongly emphasized the thinking processes because he felt that most human difficulties result from faulty thinking. He was interested in connecting thinking processes with social processes, and this is manifested in his emphasis on social action and education, which therefore, gave his philosophy a practical orientation.

Dewey felt that philosophy should be concerned with human problems in a changing and uncertain world. While most thinkers embarked upon a "quest for certainty" in which they seek true and eternal ideas, he believed that what is needed are practical solutions to practical problems. This is more in the spirit of modern science where ideas are not immutable but are accepted on the basis of how well they solve a perplexing problem. For Dewey, ideas are instruments in the solution of human problems. Thus, sometimes he preferred to use "instrumentalism" over "pragmatism" to designate his philosophy, although later he felt that the former sounded too materialistic. He described five stages of using ideas as instruments to solve real problems, beginning with experiencing a difficulty and ending with experiment leading to acceptance or rejection of the idea.¹⁷ Dewey viewed method rather than abstract answers as the central concern. He argued that "if the universe is open-ended, if existence is precarious and uncertain, we cannot expect to locate enduring solutions; instead we have to take each human problem as it arises".¹⁸

The pragmatic philosophy of education

Aims of education

Many schools in the United States of America have implemented elements of pragmatic education but this influence is not always connected with the philosophy. This is because pragmatism during its most influential period has been associated with radicalism and social reform. It was thus difficult to get pragmatic ideas into the commonly conservative and traditional schools. In fact, many pragmatic educators were interested in showing the practical use of pragmatic ideas and techniques rather than having them identified with the philosophy of pragmatism. Many people tend to associate pragmatism with progressive education. This is not true because Dewey himself was often critical of the excesses of progressivism.

The pragmatists believe that education is a necessity of life because it renews people so that they are able to face the problems encountered in their interaction with the environment. Dewey argued that civilized society exists because of the education transmitted from one generation to the next by means of the communication of habits, activities, thoughts and feelings from the older to the younger. Without education, social life cannot survive. Hence, education should not be looked upon merely as acquisition of subject matter, but as a

part of life itself.¹⁹ Dewey believed that people need society as a necessary part of their learning experiences. In the pragmatic view, education should not be looked upon as a preparation for life, but as life itself. The lives of children are as important as the lives of adults to adults. Dewey believed that education has two fundamental sides: the psychological and the sociological. One could not be subordinate to the other because the child's own instincts and powers provide the material and starting point of all education, and the educator's knowledge of social conditions is necessary to interpret the child's powers. For Dewey, the individuals should be educated as social beings, capable of participating in and directing their own social affairs.

According to Dewey, aims of education should grow out of existing conditions, be tentative, at least in the beginning, be flexible, be always directed toward the end in view. He believed that education should aim for growth²⁰. Hence the function of education "is to direct, control, and guide personal and social experience. . . . We need to make persons aware of the consequences of their actions so they may guide their actions more intelligently. In this way, people learn to control their own actions and require less outside support and direction".²¹ Schools should foster habits of thought, invention, and initiative that will assist people in growing in the right direction, that is, toward democratic living. The pragmatists felt that education should be an experimental enterprise and should assist in social renewal. It should promote a humanistic spirit and true individualism. Dewey pointed out that a "philosophy of education" is not the application of ready-made ideas to every problem but rather the formation of right mental and moral attitudes to use in attacking contemporary problems. When changes occur in social life, we must reconstruct our educational program to meet these challenges. Thus, our ideas will have a pragmatic function. Learning also affects our character and thus education has a moral influence and should play a vital part in helping us to become the moral persons who are interested in not only promoting our personal growth, but also the growth of others.

Methods of education

Pragmatism adopts the view that the method by which an individual learns is similar to the pattern of effective thinking, that is, the experimental method. Learning must always begin with existing experiences and ends with the testing of the hypotheses as resolution of problematic situation. This general conception of learning implies the need for reform in education, which traditionally has been too formal, rigid, and an education of imposition: imposition from above and outside the learner's experience; imposition of adult standards; imposition of a set of subject matter; and imposition of methods. Pragmatic educators advocate meeting the needs and interests of the child. Traditional education created a big gap between learning and experience and often worked on the assumption that this gap was essential. Pragmatic thought resulted in a new education. In place of imposition from above, it allowed for the cultivation of individuality. It supplemented discipline

with greater freedom of activity. It gave meaning to the acquisition of skills by making them a means of realizing goals. It corrected the general objective of education as preparation for a remote future by substituting it with a concern for present opportunities. It paired learning from texts and teachers with learning from experience. It introduced direct exposure to the world as dynamic and changing rather than of being static.²² Pragmatists tend toward a broad education as opposed to a specialized one. Thus, they endorse a more general education rather than narrow specialization. They argue that when one breaks knowledge into discrete elements and does not put it back together, one faces the danger of losing perspective. It is in achieving a new wholeness that pragmatism becomes humanistic and holistic.

In sum, despite a few individual variations, the pragmatists all agree that the proper method of education is experimental, flexible, open-ended, and oriented toward developing the individual's capacity to think and to participate intelligently in social life. The pragmatic methods of education are not fixed, "cookbook" methods, but are capable of being changed to fit changing circumstances.

Curriculum

Pragmatists rejected the tendency of traditional approaches to curriculum where knowledge is separated from experience and is fragmented or compartmentalized because when this happens, facts are torn away from experience and made to fit general principles that may or may not be helpful. Dewey argued that the result of fragmentation has usually been to focus attention upon subject matter rather than on the contents of the child's own experience. Dewey also criticized those, who made the child the only starting point, the centre, and the end of education. According to him, those who emphasized subject matter emphasized discipline while the second emphasized interest. The error is to see a gap between a child's interest and necessary subject matter, for the subject matter is not something fixed and ready-made outside of a child's interest.

Pragmatists want to focus at least on process, because ends should not be divorced from means. The means used to accomplish something dictate what the ends really are. For instance, if one desires the school to produce democratic citizens and then establish the school in such a way that it does not allow for choice or decision-making opportunity, then it will not be able to produce the desired citizens.

Pragmatists believe in a diversified curriculum related to functioning in a society. Hence, studies in occupations and hygiene, and in topics such as family and the economy are advocated. "Problems-centred learning", the "core curriculum", the "project method", and the "problems approach" are some of the names given to the pragmatic method.

The teacher

The responsibility of the teacher is more complex in the new education than in the old education. The teacher is not only a decision maker, a disciplinarian and task master, but in this new environment the teacher must plan for learning activities which differ from the old way in that it asks for higher demands upon the use of intelligence. The teacher must assess the capabilities and the needs of pupils, arrange appropriate learning conditions, and respect the freedom of the pupils. He is no longer the external master, but the leader of group activities. The teaching method will be based on the child's experience.

Evaluation of pragmatism and pragmatic education from an Islamic perspective

It has to be made clear that major elements of pragmatism are present in the Islamic worldview. Thinking and critical intelligence in solving problems are fundamental to the Islamic worldview. In fact, the first five verses to be revealed in the Qur'an, deals with Iqra', which means "read". Reading signifies research of the natural phenomena and also reading the Holy scripture. Reading both unwritten and written texts involved understanding. The Qur'an attaches great importance to observation, traveling and thus, sensory knowledge. For example, it exhorts:

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth:- (here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise. (Al-Baqarah 2: 164).

It was this motivation for research and learning from the Qur'an that spurred the early Muslims to develop a learning culture and to make many discoveries and inventions. The Muslims employed the scientific method in their endeavour and this has its root in the Qur'an.²³ Qadir argued that it was impossible to attribute the period of Muslim glory in science to the Greeks alone because there must have been a fertile ground that had provided the foundational knowledge before Euclid's Elements or Aristotle's Logic or de Anima could make sense to the Muslims.²⁴ Even George Sarton, the historian of science from Harvard University admitted that it was the gravitation of the Muslims around the Qur'an that led them to reach such heights in the natural sciences and mathematics.²⁵

The Qur'an calls upon Muslims to think and there are many such verses related to this. There are more than 10 thinking styles found in the Qur'an.²⁶ Hence, the call by Dewey or the other pragmatists for thinking or critical intelligence should not be strange to Muslims. Similarly, their call for the scientific spirit

or experimentalism was not foreign to Muslims. This runs well with the early Muslim culture. The importance of thinking to solve the problems confronting them led to the rise of *ijtihad* and in the early period there were many schools of thoughts - as many as those capable of *ijtihad*. It was only later that the schools were reduced to four and that too because of the students' choice of their teachers and not because of blind following.²⁷ The Prophet Muhammad's encouragement for his ummah to think is evident from the answer given by the companion Muadh who was sent as the governor of Yemen when asked how he would judge issues raised by the community. His reply was indicative of systematic thinking. He said that he would refer to the Qur'an, then the hadith and if he still could not find the solution, he would use his own judgment. We would assume that to come up with the solution, he would be engaged in something similar to Dewey's stages of inquiry. In fact Francis Bacon, who was attributed as the father of the scientific method of induction in the West was ignorant of the fact that "the inductive method which he espoused and advocated in the *Novum Organum* had been expounded by the Qur'an and by Muslim scientists and philosophers many centuries before him".²⁸ According to Briffault in his work *The making of humanity*, the Arabs were the originators of the scientific method. He asserts, "neither Roger Bacon nor his later name sake has any claim to be credited with having introduced the experimental method. Roger Bacon was no more than one of the apostles of Muslim science and method to Christian Europe . . . The experimental method of Arabs was by Bacon's time widespread and eagerly cultivated throughout Europe".²⁹

Similarly, the critical examination of traditions or customs for its worth which is a major feature of pragmatism, is also inherent in Islam. In fact, the Qur'an argues that Allah has endowed us with the physical senses to be used for empirical observations and exploration. The use of our senses, that is our sight, hearing and heart will be taken to task in the Hereafter. The Qur'an thus, denounces blind following. For example, the Qur'an gives account of those people who rejected the call to Allah because they could not abandon the practices of their forefathers although these were in error. The Qur'an urges them to use their mind to think.

They said, "comest thou to us, that we may worship God alone, and give up the cult of our fathers? Bring us what thou threatenest us with, if it be that thou tellest the truth?" (Al-'Araf 7: 70)

Nay! they say: "We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we do guide ourselves by their footsteps."

Just in the same way, whenever We sent a Warner before thee to any people, the wealthy ones among them said: "We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we will certainly follow in their footsteps."

He said: "What! Even if I brought you better guidance than which ye found your fathers following?" (Al-Zukhruf 43: 22-24).

It is clear that epistemologically, Islam does not have any difficulty with the ideas of pragmatism. Muslims do have major problem with pragmatism in its metaphysics. One of the difficulties that relates to the pragmatic metaphysics is the notion of reality which amounts to the "interaction" of the human being with his environment, the sum total of what we "experience". The world has meaning to the extent that man reads meaning into it. If the universe possesses some deeper purpose, it is hidden from man; and what man cannot experience cannot be real to him. Thus, for pragmatism, "man is the measure of all thing". Reality is created by individuals themselves or by experts, especially scientists. Clearly, the metaphysics of pragmatism would not accept the notion of the revealed scripture to provide the truth about reality because that would mean a closed, bounded system. Indeed, Childs' analysis of pragmatism and religion, led him to believe that the logic of pragmatism necessarily entails the repudiation of traditional supernaturalism but with respect to the rejection of the theistic outlook, he found that there were two camps - one is for its rejection and another against its rejection.³⁰ Another problem with its metaphysics is the idea that change is the essence of reality and consequently there are no permanent values. All values are thus, relative. This idea which originated from Darwin proposed that the world is in flux, evolving and progressing.

Pragmatic education has also been criticized for its lack of patriotic and religious fervour, its emphasis on change and relativism and its excessive freedom and lack of discipline. However the pragmatists consider them as shallow because it has been confused with progressivism. Another criticism directed against pragmatism is that it deprecates acquisition of knowledge and cognitive development by advocating a "problem" approach that takes a piece of this and that disciplines without ever fully exploring either one. Hence, students are shortchanged in terms of knowledge. Critics also felt that by organizing studies around student interests, students will lack the discipline that comes from a study in the basic subject areas. Some critics charged pragmatism for rejecting traditional values in religion, ethics, and society and tends toward values that are uncertain, changeable and impermanent. Although there are elements of truth in these allegations, Dewey did not think that one should reject traditional ideas and values out of hand, but that these should be considered as possible answers to any problem-solving activity. However, he felt that one could not afford to rely only on hand-me-down values, and that one should be constantly searching for new ideas and values in every area of human activity.

Pragmatic education for the development of the ummah

Background of Islamic education

Before discussing the nature of pragmatic education that is desirable for the ummah, it is necessary to examine the educational development of the ummah. Historically, the ummah had been creative during the late Umayyad period with respect to the religious sciences and the Abbasid period with respect to

the natural and mathematical sciences. Education was a private enterprise until the introduction of public education (madrassa) by Nizam al-Mulk in the 11 century. However, public education focused on the religious sciences and the jami' masjid focused on legal sciences. There was freedom of thoughts until al-Ma'mun adopted the mu'tazilah doctrines as a state ideology. Islam had its tribulation (mihnah) when those opposing the ideology were persecuted, including the great Imam Ibn Hanbal. Then, Imam Al-Ghazali appeared in the 12th century to criticize the excesses of the Muslim philosophers who had been influenced by the Greek philosophers. Apparently, the attack by al-Ghazali weakened philosophical thought in the Muslim World. Although he intended to only refute those philosophers for their erratic ideas, while still encouraging the study of mathematics and medicine, the fear of apostasy still gripped the people. The official sciences that survived were basically the religious sciences and this was the period of "commentaries" and "super commentaries", to use the jargon of Fazlur Rahman.³¹ The final blow to the development of thought in the Muslim world came with the attack of Baghdad, the centre of Muslim learning by the Mongols in 1258 and the downfall of Andalusia in 1492. Since then, with the exception of a few illustrious figures such as Ibn Taymiyah (1263-1328) and Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) in the 14 century, the Muslim world had gone into a deep slumber.

Efforts at educational reforms

One of the earliest efforts at reform was Ibn Taymiyah's revolt against the authority of the jurisprudential schools and Sufism. Ibn Taymiyah protested against bid'ah (religious innovations). He believed that Islam was corrupted by Sufism, pantheism, theology (kalam), philosophy and by all sorts of superstitious beliefs. He wrote books against Sufism conformism and Aristotelianism. By criticizing Aristotle's deductive logic, Ibn Taymiyah reminded his compatriots of the need for readopting the empirical methods of investigation, in order to capture the lost glory of Islam. Revolting against the finality of the schools and claiming freedom of ijtihad, Ibn Taymiyah went back to First Principles in order to make a fresh start by going back to its original source, the Qur'an and the sunnah.

There were more efforts to awaken the Muslims, in particular in the 19 and early 20 century by Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Abduh in the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent. If we examine closely the arguments of Afghani, Abduh and Ahmad Khan, we will notice that they were pragmatic. Afghani who was more politically inclined, was calling for Muslim liberation from the yoke of colonialism through their unity. Afghani and Abduh criticized the ulama' for their role in inculcating taqlid or blind following among the ummah. They injected the ideas that the ummah needs to be educated and thinking beings. They should not be blind followers. In fact, Afghani preached the necessity for introducing philosophy to Muslims to rejuvenate their minds and called for the reopening of the door of ijtihad.

Abduh and Sayyid Ahmad attempted to introduce modern education into the existing traditional institutions in the case of Abduh and by establishing new schools and institutions in the case of Sayyid Ahmad. Modern education was understood to mean the introduction of science and its methods. Although Abduh did not succeed in Al-Azhar and in Egypt in general, he succeeded in sowing the seed of modern education through the publication of *Al Manar* and this was evident in Malaysia with the efforts of Shaikh Ahmad al-Hadi, who established *Madrasa Iqbal* in Singapore in 1905, another madrasa in Malacca and finally one in Penang. With independence, most of the national school systems adopted the liberal, secular philosophy of its colonial master, while the "loose" religious school system was marginalized without having a strong organization. It is only after the World Conference of Muslim Education in 1977 that efforts have been made to desecularize the national school systems, to revise its philosophy to be in line with the Islamic philosophy of education and to end educational dualism. An integrated curriculum was called for. However, to do this requires political will, especially if the country is a pluralist country. Despite this, the curriculum of the religious schools remains religious-centred and thus was not able to produce graduates who were ready to accept the challenge of their period. In some countries, such as Pakistan and Indonesia, the madrasa and pesantren are important until today because they are able to provide for mass education. The governments are not able to establish widespread public education. In Malaysia, the madrasa played a significant role in mass education before the country's independence and the existence of a national education system. However, pragmatically, it has served its time. Graduates of madrasa have found it difficult to enroll in higher education because of the lack of foundation subjects and the lack of spaces for specialization in the religious sciences. In addition, the government has revised its school curriculum to cater for the religious need of the Muslim citizens and also established a few integrated, modern educational institutions produce more integrated Muslim professionals and scholars of Islamic sciences.

Pragmatic education and the development of Muslim minds

Despite the reform movement, many Islamic schools still employ teaching methods which are inclined toward moral prescription or blind indoctrination. "You must not steal because that is not good and it is against the injunction of the Qur'an. You will be punished and will be thrown into hell fire." "You must be honest because Allah loves those who are honest." "You must pray because if you don't, then you will not be able to enter the garden of Paradise." "You must read the Qur'an because you will be rewarded for every letter that is recited, not only for each word but for each letter!" Moral individuals do not arise from moral prescription alone. The individuals also need the ability to reason morally and this is lacking in the teaching method. When students are taught through moral prescriptions that do not consider contexts, then they cannot resort to good judgment when confronted with unfamiliar situations. They have not been taught how to think using the religious principles and to also consider the circumstances. They have also not been taught to think critically.

The misfortunes arising from this deficiency in method are many but I will illustrate it with one sad incident. Last year a number of schoolgirls in Saudi Arabia were burnt to death during a school fire. They were already at the front gate of the school running to save their lives when they were stopped by this mutawwif who chased them back in because they were without their head covers. By the time they got their head covers, it was too late and they died. Could this incident be avoided? Yes, it is fated (the Muslims' lazy way of continuing deliberation and solving problem) but isn't there any lesson for all of us? Why was the mutawwif blind to the difference between a normal and a life threatening situation? Why is he so adamant not to let the girls out unless they wear their hijab? Is the hijab more important than the girls' lives? This is a clear case of imposing Islamic religious principle without the use of reason.

Secondly, the teachers of Islamic sciences have not been innovative and creative in discovering effective methods of teaching the subject. There are ways of teaching the Qur'an and Islamic history more interestingly and lively that integrate the ayat (signs) of the Creator found in the natural phenomena to illustrate the verses of the Qur'an. One such example is to show the ayat of Allah in the human body, which He asserts in the Qur'an. If one can do that, then one will really impress the Majesty of Allah through something that is very close to the students. Much scientific knowledge on the workings of the human body has been acquired to date and many have been illustrated in beautiful charts, diagrams, presentations that they could be easily put up in the class. Unfortunately, our teachers are not well versed in these sciences so as to use it effectively in their classrooms. History and the remains of the ancient civilizations are examples from another perspective that could also be vividly employed.

Finally, some Islamic religious schools do not give great importance to the teaching of the natural sciences and mathematics, compared to the religious sciences. In fact, these schools do not provide strong foundations to specialize in these sciences in higher education. In a sense there will be a loss of potential minds for the scientific community since students have not been exposed to find out their 'other' potential. This will ultimately deprive the Muslim ummah of the scholars needed to fulfill the fardhu kifayah obligation. It is due to this kind of inadequacy that Muslim parents prefer for their children to attend the liberal, secular schools, although they will miss out on the fardhu 'ayn knowledge. It is crucial to teach science satisfactorily because the scientific mind will aid in destroying myths, supernatural beliefs or belief on man's unseen power. It will also provide our youth with the scientific method which could also be used to experiment with ideas.

Pragmatic education could play a significant role in the development of the ummah. It is imperative for Islamic education to develop critical minds among the Muslim youth. Hence, some elements of pragmatic teaching methods and curriculum that have been described in the first part of this paper could be adopted. In other words, our education should also consider the child's interest besides that of the adults. It should be geared towards critical intelligence and

this could be achieved through problem-based learning or the project approach. Islamic education should encourage students to have a questioning attitude, even with regards to their culture, religion and society. Teachers should allow for questions and discussion, and guide students' learning besides the traditional roles they are familiar with. Teacher should avoid as much lecture or preaching as possible. In this respect, teachers should adopt the judicial and legislative thinking styles shown in Table 1 rather than the executive style, for instruction and evaluation purposes. Table 1 shows that the judicial thinking style will result in critical thinking while the legislative thinking style will result in creative thinking. Teachers should model the thinking process and underscore the importance of the process of reaching the solution and not just the solution itself. This will be more in line with the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad's hadith that one is rewarded double rewards for a correct *ijtihad* and one reward for an incorrect one. Hence, the hadith is a motivation to perform thinking and that is more crucial than attaining the right solution because in both, accurate or inaccurate solution, one is rewarded by Allah.

Table 1. Thinking styles, Instructional and Evaluational Assignments

Thinking styles emphasized		
Executive (structured)	Judicial (critical)	Legislative (creative)
Type of prompt:		
Who said?	Compare and contrast	Create ...
Summarize ...	Analyze ...	Invent ...
Who did?	Evaluate ...	If you ...
When did?	In your judgment ...	Imagine ...
What did?	Why did?	Design ...
How did?	What caused?	How would?
Repeat back ...	What is assumed by?	Suppose ...
Describe ...	Critique ...	Ideally?

Source R.J. Sternberg, *Thinking styles*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 123.

Table 2. The standard and reflective paradigms of educational practice

Standard	Reflective
Transmission of knowledge	Teacher-guided community of inquiry
World is not mysterious, unambiguous	World is mysterious, ambiguous
Disciplines non-overlapping & exhaustive	Disciplines NOT non-overlapping & exhaustive
Teacher authoritative	Teacher fallibilistic
Students absorb information	Students thoughtful and reflective
Focus on acquisition of information	Focus on grasping relationships – meaning

Source Modified from M. Lipman, *Thinking in Education*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14.

Muslim teachers must adopt the reflective paradigm rather than the standard paradigm (Table 2) so that they could produce thoughtful and reflective students. They must change their understanding of teaching from one which merely emphasizes the transmission of facts or acquisition of information for storing in the students mind, to guiding students who form a community of inquiry for understanding or meaning as a result of the habit of thinking and reflecting. In this context, the world will be regarded as still mysterious and could be further explored in contrast to the view that is it not mysterious, which will not encourage exploration. In the reflective paradigm, teachers are considered fallible and not authoritative and in this era, this is a more appropriate model because of the amount of information that one can access to through various resources, of which the school - teacher and texts - is only one such resource.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is vital to reiterate the importance reawakening the Muslim minds to be critical, creative and wise especially in the context of the contemporary period where there are a lot of challenges facing the ummah, from within and without. Our schools should turn out Muslims possessing good judgment for their survival in this world. In this context of solving our problems in our daily lives, I believe that certain elements of pragmatism, in particular its concern for critical and creative intelligence, its encouragement for the questioning attitude and the scientific method could be adopted. However, Muslim teachers and students have to be made aware of the pitfall of pragmatism if adopted without any check and balance. There is a danger of falling into the excess of reason like what had happened to the mu'tazilah. Similarly, there could be the danger of going astray from the Islamic shari'ah if logical positivism, which considers truth as something that can be verified empirically only, rears its head. The checks and balance will be attained by ensuring a religious curriculum, which is sound in its metaphysics and Qur'anic ethics side by side. In this way only would we be able to lead both our life in a balanced manner for both the mundane and the sacred worlds.

Allahu 'alam.

(21 Sept 2004)

Endnotes

- ¹ See International Crisis Group, *Pakistan: Madrasas, extremism and the militancy*, ICG Asia Report No. 36, Islamabad/Brussels, 29 July 2002.
- ² For changes in school textbooks in the Middle East, see 'Sweeping reforms in Qatari schools, *Star*, 9 March, 2003. Qatari leaders have warned of a US-led campaign to rewrite textbooks, change time-honoured teaching methods and cut back on the amount of religion in the curriculum.
- ³ 'Sweeping reforms in Qatari schools', *Sunday Star*, March 9, 2003.
- ⁴ H. Ozmon & S. Craver, *Philosophical foundations of education* (Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing Company, 1990), 118.

- ⁵ See G.F. Kneller, *Introduction to the philosophy of education* 2d ed. (NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 13.
- ⁶ Donald Butler, *Four philosophies and their practice in education and religion* 3ded. (NY: Harper & Row, 1968), 118.
- ⁷ Ibid., 375.
- ⁸ Ibid 379.
- ⁹ Ibid 382.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Kneller, *Introduction to the philosophy of education*, 13
- ¹² H. Ozmon & S. Craver, 119.
- ¹³ See J. D. Butler, *Four philosophies and their practice in education and religion*, Part 5.
- ¹⁴ Ozmon & Craver, 125.
- ¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion, see Philip P. Weiner, *Evolution and the founders of pragmatism* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1940).
- ¹⁶ Ozmon & Craver, 129.
- ¹⁷ In some works example Butler's, six stages of problem solving were cited instead of five.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 131.
- ¹⁹ For further discussion on education as a social function; education for growth, experience in education and thinking in education, see Joim Dewey, *Democracy and education* (New York: The Free Press, 1944).
- ²⁰ For further details, see R.D.Archarnbault, *John Dewey on education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 4.
- ²¹ Quoted in Ozmon & Craver, 139.
- ²² Butler, 417
- ²³ The scientific method is clearly demonstrated in the case of Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh)'s search for God. He initially hypothesized the star as God but that was falsified. Then he hypothesized the moon and next the sun but both were falsified. Then he ultimately realized that none of these were permanent, as was their creator, the One God (Qur'an, Al-An'am 6: 75-79).
- ²⁴ C.A.Qadir, *Philosophy and science in the Islamic world* (Routledge, London, 1988).
- ²⁵ See G. Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science* (Baltimore, MD: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1927), Vols. 1-3.
- ²⁶ See J Badi and M. Tajdin, *Creative thinking from an Islamic perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Research Centre, 2003).
- ²⁷ See G. Makdisi, *The rise of colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).
- ²⁸ C.A. Qadir, *Philosophy and science in the Islamic world*, 19.
- ²⁹ Quoted in Qadir, 21.
- ³⁰ J.L. Childs, *American pragmatism and education* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1956), 335.
- ³¹ See F. Rahrnan, *Islam and modernity: transformation of an intellectual tradition* (Chicago: U.of Chicago Press, 1979).